

Peace of evening prayer leaves a longing

It was a great pleasure to celebrate evening prayer on Wednesday with the people of the Seneca-Cayuga Region of our diocese. The gathering, held at Auburn's Holy Family Church, was the first of the 11 Jubilee evening prayer celebrations planned for this year.

I always find the quiet and peaceful pace of evening prayer to be a beautiful experience. I suppose that is because it tends, among other good effects, to soothe the spirit and quiet the nerves after a busy day. I think it also helps those who celebrate to put the day's events in a healthy perspective because such prayer — especially when celebrated in common — helps us to appreciate life beyond the pressure of the moment and the immediacy of our own personal concerns.

Sitting in the presider's chair at Holy Family provided a lively opportunity to be aware of the response of people in the assembly to the prayer experience. My sense was that the men and women, boys and girls who were there enjoyed the experience very much. That impression was affirmed by the many positive comments made by those in attendance.

Time and other circumstances didn't allow opportunity for lengthy conversa-

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



tion about why people enjoyed it so much. However, several remarked at their pleasure with the music — both the congregational song and the participation of the excellent choir of St. Mary's Parish, Auburn. Others cited two other aspects of the service that pleased them very much. These were the beauty of the biblical readings that were at the heart of the celebration, and the restful tone and occasional periods of silence that characterized the evening prayer liturgy.

As happens so often when people have the opportunity, they tend to comment on how such liturgical experiences speak to their lives. In this instance it was clear to me that the comments people made at the reception at Auburn expressed a common theme — that we could all use more such moments of

peaceful, quiet reflection on the word of God in our lives.

I took these comments to mean, certainly, that they would welcome other liturgical celebrations of evening prayer such as we experienced at Holy Family that night. But I know that their comments also expressed a longing — as yet unrealized in consistent ways — that they could establish similar patterns of quiet and dedicated openness to God amid the pressures of everyday life.

I took a great deal of encouragement from their comments — for myself and for them. For myself, because their desire for a deeper spiritual life, a more consistent life of prayer, strengthened me in my own. For them, because the history of our tradition is rich in the experience of prayers by individuals of all description in all manner of circumstances.

There is no one way to pray. Our own life of prayer is likely to change often over the course of our lives. What seems to be most important is a desire on our part to be open to the presence and action of God in our lives, and our honest effort to make ourselves available to such precious gifts.

Peace to all.

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